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RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 3067

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000738

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: LAND RIGHTS PROTEST IN FRONT OF CONGEN

REF: HCMC 706

¶1. (SBU) On July 10 at 0845, 30 elderly men and women carrying placards protesting various land rights issues marched past the Consulate. Local police officials quickly but peacefully dispersed the group. In accordance with standard post security procedures, a Consulate local guard photographed the protesters from inside the guard booth. A plainclothes police supervisor who was monitoring the activities of the group demanded that we provide the name of the guard who took the photos, saying that police did not want pictures taken of the protesters because they do not want the protests publicized. RSO responded that the pictures were taken for internal ConGen security purposes only and would not be released to the media, and stated that we would not provide copies of the pictures or the names of the guards involved in taking them.

¶2. (SBU) A contact in the HCMC media told us that GVN censors have instructed the press not to report on the land demonstrations, which continue daily in front of the HCMC National Assembly offices. According to our media contact, there were perhaps 300 persons in front of the National Assembly Office at the height of the protest. Over the course of the past few weeks, that number has dwindled to a maximum of 150. Most of these protesters are from Tien Giang province, although some are from other provinces in the Mekong Delta as well as Binh Phuoc and Tay Ninh provinces. Post observed roughly 60 persons -- an undetermined mix of protesters and plainclothes police -- in front of the National Assembly office building on the morning of July 7. Contacts in the land rights movement report that police are watching the protesters carefully, and have sought to bring in a key leader for questioning. Thus far, that individual has refused the police summons and is being "protected" by the other protestors.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: A solid core of the protesters have rejected government overtures to return home and find a "mediated solution." These protesters are relatively organized and appear to be focused on drumming up attention and support from the overseas Vietnamese community. The authorities are being careful. With the exception of the clash between protesters and police on July 1 (reftel), HCMC authorities have thus far taken a relatively hands-off approach, not preventing protesters from assembling daily in front of the National Assembly building and not moving forcefully to arrest a key protest leader. End Comment.

SCHWENK